

## *Lessons from the Early Church*

**F. F. Bruce**

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When the editors of this volume invited me to contribute something to it in the form of lessons to be learned from the primitive era of the church, it seemed to me that this was an exercise which I had undertaken several times across the years, ever since J. B. Watson persuaded me to write a chapter on 'Church History and its Lessons' for *The Church: A Symposium*, which appeared under his editorship in 1949. For several reasons, however, I was glad to accept their invitation. A further twenty-five years' reflection on the beginnings of the Christian church has taught me lessons of whose existence I had no inkling when I wrote that earlier chapter. The relationship of the New Testament church with the church of the present day is a subject which, in one aspect or another, I have frequently discussed with Cecil Howley, and it appears most appropriate that I should say something about it in a symposium designed to do him honour. It is natural that some of the illustrative material in what I write should be drawn from that tradition of church order which he and I share; it is perhaps also natural that some examples should be adduced from that venerable tradition which forms part of his Southern Irish heritage. Whether the resultant essay provides serious lessons is for others to say; I take leave to present at least some thoughts from the early church.

### **WHICH CHURCH?**

If Peter and Paul could come back to earth for a week or two—say, to one of the cities, such as Rome, which they knew in their day—where would they find most congenial fellowship on a Sunday morning? If this question were asked

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in some mixed audiences, the questioner would have to beg his hearers to answer one at a time; otherwise there would be a deafening babel of conflicting replies. Many of the replies, however, could be reduced to a common formula: With us, of course! But wherever they might go today, they would probably find the company and the proceedings strange, and that not only because of the changes in language and culture that the passing centuries have brought.

But if they did come back and find congenial fellowship, would they necessarily find it in one and the same company? We may assume that they would, but we might be wrong. There was one famous occasion, in Syrian Antioch, when Peter found the company kept by Paul inconveniently inclusive, and sought a more restricted fellowship—although this, we must admit, was not so much from his own choice as from a desire not to make life too awkward for his friends back home in Jerusalem. One of those friends was James, the Lord's brother—and it appears, incidentally, that when they were in Jerusalem Peter and James did not belong to the same household church. If Peter belonged to the group which met in the house of Mary the mother of John Mark, he knew that James and 'the brethren' (whoever they were) met somewhere else (Acts 12:17). Since the church of Jerusalem, according to Luke,

was several thousand strong, it could not meet as a whole in one place; and of the household groups which it comprised, those would count themselves particularly happy which had an apostle or comparable leader in their membership. Moreover, human nature being what it is, in the first century or the twentieth, we should expect that some of these groups would attract those who preferred more cautious and conservative ways while others (like the Hellenistic groups to which Stephen and his associates had belonged before persecution drove them out) would be more liberal and adventurous.

Hypothetical questions are not very fruitful. Let us ask one of a more factual sort. Where did Peter and Paul go when they visited Rome? Not to St Peter's or St Paul's, we may be sure, for in AD 60 there were no Christian basilicas on the

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Vatican hill or by the Ostian Way. Paul indeed was not in a position to 'go' anywhere when first he came to Rome; he had to remain under house-arrest, and other people came to him. It would not be surprising if Paul's tenement flat became the locus for a small and variable household church during his two-years custody in Rome, over and above the many household churches already existing in the city. Some purists would discourage us from referring to the 'church' of Rome in AD 60; the Letter to the Romans, they point out, is not addressed to a city church, as several of Paul's other letters are, and a number of separate household churches receive mention in Paul's list of greetings in Romans 16:3-16. At the same time, there must have been sufficient cohesion, or at least communication, between the various groups for Paul to be confident that his letter would reach 'all God's beloved in Rome, who are called to be saints' (Romans 1:7).

It was probably to one of the household churches in Rome—one with Jewish antecedents and associations—that the Letter to the Hebrews was written a few years after Paul's Letter to the Romans. And a century later Justin Martyr, asked by the city prefect where he gathered together his disciples, replied that it was 'above one Martin, at the Timiotinian Baths'; 'and', he added, 'all this time (and this is my second visit to Rome) know no other meeting than his.' Justin's professed ignorance of any other meeting may simply mean that he had never been to any other; in any case, the meeting which Justin and his friends frequented could have been much more like a philosopher's school than the average household church in Rome.

Before they had church buildings of their own (as they had in several places by the end of the third century), Christians met for worship in private houses, a special room in such a house being sometimes set apart for Christian meetings. Of this we have clear evidence in some of the most ancient Christian sites in Rome, for example in the substructure of the basilica of San Clemente. It is a moving experience for a Christian visitor to reflect that Christian worship has been carried on continuously on such sites from the days of the

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imperial persecutions, over a period of seventeen or even eighteen centuries.

It is almost an article of faith with Protestants that Roman Catholic worship represents a sad falling away from the practice of apostolic times. But when a Roman Catholic visits Rome, he is impressed with the sense of historical continuity. On this and that site, he feels, century by

century, the holy mysteries of the faith have been celebrated from the remote beginnings of Roman Christianity, and in the same language. It is not easy to persuade him that the form of Christianity which he knows, and which he believes to be attested by the most ancient Christian monuments, is a corruption of apostolic Christianity. If Peter came back to Rome, he may think he would be quite at home in (say) Santa Pudenziana, built on the site of the house of Pudens where, according to tradition, he lived for seven years.

Well, we may say, *we* know better. But do we? Change there certainly has been during these eighteen centuries—change sometimes for the worse but sometimes for the better. But the general *pattern* of worship today in any one of these ancient churches is recognizably the same as it was by the end of the second century. Are we then bound to conclude that there were greater changes in the first two centuries of the faith than there have been since then? If so, when did these changes take place? To locate them in the 'tunnel' period between AD 75 and 175 is easy, just because our inadequate knowledge of the details of church life in that period makes it difficult to disprove many statements that are made about what happened then. At the end of the period we are confronted by the catholic church, the catholic ministry, the catholic canon and the catholic faith in a more developed form than they had at the beginning of the period; but the roots of this fourfold development are present before we enter the tunnel.

Is such development a bad thing or a good thing?

### **DEPARTURE OR DEVELOPMENT?**

When I was in my teens I read with great interest a

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paperback which came into our home, entitled *Departure* (1925). The author (G. H. Lang) indicated the main thrust of his thesis more fully in the sub-title: 'A warning and an appeal addressed by one of themselves mainly to Christians known as Open Brethren'. I was not unduly troubled by the current tendencies which he deplored; indeed, in so far as I knew anything about them, I may even have approved of some of them. What fascinated me chiefly was the use which he made of early church history. I realize now that he leaned too heavily on Edwin Hatch's Bampton Lectures on *The Organization of the Early Christian Churches* (1880), with his theory that the bishop was in origin the principal financial officer. But one fact emerged quite unmistakably, above all others, from Mr Lang's comparative study: when a modern movement starts out with the deliberate intention of reproducing the life and order of the apostolic age, it will before long reproduce the features of the *post*-apostolic age, such as standardization of worship, ministry and doctrine, formalizing of inter-church relations, and so forth. These features might be regarded by some as natural or even desirable developments; what the author of *Departure* thought of them is shown by the title of his book. In fact, some of them were of the nature of development and others of the nature of departure. Development and departure are two different things and should not be confused. Development is the unfolding of what is there already, even if only implicitly; departure involves the abandonment of one principle or basis in favour of another.

More recently, Roy Coad's *History of the Brethren Movement* (1968) has enriched us in many ways with the remembrance of things past, and not least by quotations from a work nowadays

known only to a few—Henry Craik's *New Testament Church Order* (1863)—which anticipated B. H. Streeter's *The Primitive Church* (1929) in pointing out that the New Testament provides adumbrations of episcopalian, presbyterian and congregational church order, alongside 'what may be described as less systematic than any of the above organizations.' This is a matter of simple truth, but it was

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highly unfashionable to acknowledge such a simple truth in the middle of the nineteenth century. 'It appears to me', said Craik, 'that the early churches were not, in all places, similarly constituted.' A consideration of the constitution and government (or non-government) of the churches of Jerusalem, Antioch, Corinth and Rome in the apostolic church would confirm his statement.

Paul indeed seems to have attached some importance to preserving a certain measure of uniform practice throughout his churches. In writing to the volatile church of Corinth he urges it more than once to restrain its tendency to deviation and bring its practices into some kind of conformity with those of 'the churches of God' (I Cor. 11:16) or 'all the churches of the saints' (I Cor. 14:33b). While he was primarily concerned with churches of his own planting, in which he was entitled to institute his own ruling (I Cor. 7:17), he appears to have had in mind the wisdom of maintaining in his own churches some degree of conformity with churches not of his planting, especially with the mother-church of Jerusalem and her daughter-churches. It is plain that he was always anxious to foster fellowship between his Gentile mission and the Jerusalem church, and this fellowship would have been strained even more than it was if the Gentile churches used unfettered discretion (not to speak of indiscretion) in matters of ecclesiastical order. Arnold Ehrhardt once pointed out that Paul was 'one of the greatest assets for the Church at Jerusalem', despite Jerusalem's misgivings about him, because under his influence, when not by his personal action, non-Jerusalem versions of the gospel were brought into line with that which he and the Jerusalem leaders held in common.<sup>1</sup> Even so, diversities in primitive church order can be discerned; they would have been greater but for Paul's policy, arising out of his concern to maintain unity not only within churches but between churches.

But Henry Craik was not content with drawing attention to diversities of primitive church order; as Mr. Coad also reminds us, he recognized a *development* of order within the New Testament. Again, in saying that in apostolic times 'a

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more fully developed church organization and official position were introduced as occasion called for them,' Craik was saying something which has only to be stated to be recognized as true. But if it is true, it rules out any idea that one uniform and unchangeable pattern is to be discerned in the apostolic writings and followed by all churches which wish to be scripturally ordered. The one uniform pattern which can indeed be discerned in the New Testament is the pattern of flexibility which facilitates instead of impeding the free movement of the Spirit as he makes provision for the churches and their members as and when the need arises.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Framework of the New Testament Stories* (1964), p. 94.

## SPIRIT AND STRUCTURE

'Like Jordan,' wrote R. B. Rackham in expounding the Pentecostal narrative of Acts 2, 'the full and plenteous flood of the Spirit "overflows all its banks" (Josh. 3:15). At first the worn-out vessels of humanity cannot contain it; and there is a flood of strange and novel spiritual experiences. But when it has worn for itself a deep channel in the church, when the laws of the new spiritual life are learnt and understood, then some of the irregular phenomena disappear, others become normal, and what was thought to be miraculous is found to be a natural endowment of the Christian life.'<sup>2</sup> This should be borne in mind on the recurring occasions when God does a new thing in the church, and those who are responsible to maintain decency and order are disturbed by the incursion of unfamiliar and unpredictable practices.

There was probably a time in the early days of the Brethren movement when, with the conscious abandonment of a fixed liturgy, one never knew in the course of a meeting for worship what was going to happen next. Nowadays, with the fixation in many places of another (albeit unwritten) liturgy, one often knows only too well what is going to happen next. Some of us may think that our familiar order of worship provides adequate room for the liberty of the Spirit, but by use and wont we have come to expect the Spirit to move in well-recognized ways. It might cause no little surprise in some places, and possibly even dismay, if (for

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instance) at a communion service a couple of young people contributed to the worship by singing an impromptu duet, with or without guitar accompaniment. In other places, however, their contribution might be accepted spontaneously in the spirit in which it was offered.

It is, in fact, a mistake to set the charismatic and institutional aspects of church life in opposition the one to the other: both are necessary. The flood waters of the Spirit will drain away ineffectively without vessels or channels to contain them and convey them to the areas where they are most needed; the vessels or channels, for their part, require to be filled with the life-giving water if they are not to be empty and useless. The institutions or structures may be traditional, but they are none the worse for that if they serve a useful purpose; on the other hand, to maintain institutions or structures for their own sake when they have outlived their usefulness is traditionalism of the wrong kind.

What sort of institutions or structures, then, should be regarded as most desirable? Light and flexible ones, which can be maintained without undue cost and labour so long as they are serviceable, and be dismantled without regret when something more suited to the needs of a new day comes along. Some institutions are allowed to grow so old and venerable that the idea of scrapping them is unthinkable sacrilegious. Consider as an example the historic episcopate, which sometimes proves to be a very awkward obstacle in the path of Christian unity. At one time the historic episcopate was a safeguard against the intrusion of subversive doctrine and other dangers; does it fill this role today? If it does, good and well; but some churches which preserve it are not more obviously free from the menace of erroneous teaching and practice than are others which live happily without it.

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<sup>2</sup> *The Acts of the Apostles*, Westminster Commentaries, 14th ed. (1951), pp. 15-16.

Something to the same effect may be said about the historic formularies in which the church has traditionally confessed her faith. The ancient creeds are worthy of Christian veneration and acceptance since, as Article VIII of the Anglican Thirty-nine Articles of Religion puts it, 'they may be proved by most certain warrants of holy Scripture'.

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But the language of some of them is too technical (and technical in a fourth and fifth-century sense) to be readily understood by many Christians who recite them today. It may be reasonably answered that the Christian who recites the Nicene Creed is not so much expressing his personal faith as confessing his membership in the church whose faith is set forth in these terms; but it is better when the question 'Understandest thou what thou sayest?' can receive an affirmative reply. More than that: experience shows that the regular recital of the ancient creeds in a Christian community does not guarantee that it will be more immune from false doctrine than other communities in which they are rarely or never recited. To judge by fragments of confessional statements embedded in the New Testament writings, Christians of apostolic days got along with fairly simple affirmations of faith, which were yet explicit enough to exclude denials of Christ's lordship or of His incarnation. If we inherit or devise confessions of faith, let them at the same tune conserve the apostolic witness and be flexible enough to accommodate whatever light the Lord may yet have to break forth from His holy Word.

## **UNITY IN THE APOSTOLIC CHURCH**

Such unity as was maintained in first-century Christianity was not ensured by a superstructure. There were the apostles, indeed, but we should not exaggerate or idealize the extent of their authority. Paul did not care to have the authority of the Jerusalem apostles imposed by their emissaries on his Gentile churches: after his contretemps with Peter at Antioch he could never be sure that one of them might not yield to pressure as (in his judgment) Peter did and sell the pass. He had no thought of imposing his own authority outside the limits of his commission—we can see how careful he is in this regard when writing to the Roman church, which was 'another man's foundation'—but his restraint was not always matched by others, and there were those who questioned his apostolic status and did their best to undermine his authority even in his own mission field.

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There was, of course, a basic unity of faith and life. Paul himself acknowledges that the outline of the gospel—Christ died, Christ was buried, Christ was raised the third day—was common ground to himself and the Jerusalem leaders (I Cor. 15:3-11). And in an alien world anyone who called Jesus Messiah or Lord or Son of God would be greeted by Christians as one of themselves. But the extremist judaizers would have qualified as fellow-Christians by this test, and so probably would many of the gnosticizers. If some of the latter were so 'way out' as to say 'Jesus is anathema' (I Cor. 12:3)—meaning perhaps that the heavenly Christ was all that mattered now, while the earthly Jesus was no longer of any account—they would scarcely have been recognized as true believers by the Christian majority.

The New Testament bears ample witness to the centrifugal tendencies in apostolic Christianity: we have only to think of the tensions between Jewish and Gentile Christians, between legalists and libertarians, between the rank and file who were content with the 'simple gospel' and the spiritual elite who preferred what they imagined to be more advanced teaching. But it bears ample witness also to the centripetal forces which kept churches and Christians together, and the greatest of these was love. Here we may think of the spontaneity with which the young Antiochene church came to the aid of Jerusalem in time of scarcity and of the readiness with which Paul assented to the request of the Jerusalem leaders that he and Barnabas should go on remembering the poor, readiness which manifested itself on the largest scale in the Jerusalem relief fund which he organized among his Gentile churches. This example persisted in the post-apostolic age. Some churches were outstanding in charitable enterprise, especially the church in Rome. Half a century after Paul's stay in Rome, Ignatius begins his letter to the church there by commending it for its distinction in every noble quality, and above all for its exercising the 'presidency of love' among all the churches—a worthy primacy indeed!

Later in the second century (*c.* AD 170) Dionysius, bishop of Corinth, wrote to the Roman church and congratulated it

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on the way in which it kept up its tradition of generosity to churches in need. 'Your blessed bishop Soter has not only maintained this custom but enhanced it by his administration of the largesse distributed to the saints and by the encouragement given by his blessed words to the brethren who come to Rome, addressing them as an affectionate father would his children.'<sup>3</sup>

## **PRINCIPLES OF CATHOLICITY**

This letter of Dionysius illustrates another centripetal force of special interest. He refers to his own church of Corinth as being, like the Roman church, a joint foundation of the two apostles Peter and Paul.<sup>4</sup> Paul would certainly have disclaimed any part in the founding of the Roman church, but he might well have turned in his grave at the suggestion that the Corinthian church was founded in part by Peter. And yet Dionysius's attitude, while it outrages historical fact, reflects a sound instinct, and one which Paul himself would have approved. When, shortly after he founded it, the church of Corinth showed signs of splitting up into parties, each appropriating as its figurehead some name of renown in the Christian world of that day, Paul insisted that such a course was foolish self-impoverishment; all of them were entitled to an equal share in all the leading teachers: 'whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas..., all are yours' (I Cor. 3:22).

It was a mark of the catholic church of the second century (more explicitly, a mark of its catholicity) that it claimed as complete an apostolic heritage as it could. Splinter groups might restrict themselves to one strand in the Christian tradition: the Marcionites might look on Paul as the only faithful apostle and dismiss the Twelve as compromisers with Judaism, while the Ebionites might execrate Paul's name and venerate the memory of Peter and, pre-eminently, of James the Just. But the catholic church included in its comprehensive canon everything that

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<sup>3</sup> Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* iv. 23.9-11.

<sup>4</sup> *Ecclesiastical History* ii. 25.8.

could reasonably be regarded as apostolic, not (as Marcion did) the epistles of Paul only but those of other apostles and apostolic men.

Whatever tensions might have existed in the apostolic age

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between Peter and Paul or between their respective followers, these were transcended a generation or two later. Clement of Rome, at the end of the first century, and Ignatius of Antioch, at the beginning of the second, give Peter and Paul joint honourable mention in a Roman setting. More than that, the canonical Petrine literature contains a friendly reference to 'our beloved brother Paul' (II Peter 3:15), even if it is acknowledged that some of his writings are difficult to understand and liable to be seriously misconstrued.

This agreement to pay simultaneous respect to Peter and Paul, together with the other apostles, is frequently said to be a symptom of 'incipient Catholicism', and it would be pointless to deny this. But incipient Catholicism, especially under its German designation *Frühkatholizismus*, is viewed by many theologians in the Lutheran tradition as a deplorable declension from the purity of the Pauline gospel, so much so that those New Testament books in which it appears are judged for that reason to be sub-Pauline, post-apostolic and at best deuterocanonical. Other symptoms of this declension are said to be the replacement of a charismatic by an institutional ministry, the extension of the term 'church' from the local congregation to cover the world-wide community of Christian people, the adoption of a codified confession of faith and the recession of the imminent hope of glory at the parousia in favour of dependence on the means of grace presently dispensed through the church and its ministry.

In some measure most of these symptoms are present in the New Testament. But the last-mentioned is not to be found. The church as an institution has not yet become the guardian and dispenser of the means of grace. Even in the Pastoral Letters the church is the witness and custodian of the divine revelation, like Israel in earlier days (cf. Romans 3:2), 'the pillar and bulwark of the truth' (I Tim. 3:15). In these three letters, our earliest manuals of church order, the ministry is indeed institutional but has not ceased to be charismatic. Timothy himself has been 'instituted' by prophecy (I Tim. 1:18) and the Spirit still speaks 'expressly' in the church (I Tim. 4:1), although now perhaps through apostolic writings

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as well as through the lips of prophets. Certainly in the Pastoral Letters the truth is well on its way to being codified (although primitive confessional fragments have been detected in the earliest New Testament documents) and 'the faith' is now used not only subjectively, of the faith with which Christians believe, but objectively, of the sum of what they believe (as also in Jude 3). But these things are simply aspects of that development which Henry Craik discerned within the New Testament itself. The development did not cease when the latest New Testament document was penned, nor was there any reason why it should. If it be asked further (in the light of what has been already said) how development is to be distinguished from departure, or how it can be prevented from lapsing into departure, the answer may lie in certain criteria which the New Testament writings themselves provide.

## ONE BODY, ONE FAITH

Another aspect of incipient Catholicism appears in the Letter to the Ephesians. 'In the New Testament', says Ernst Käsemann, 'it is Ephesians that most clearly marks the transition from the Pauline tradition to the perspective of the early Catholic era.'<sup>5</sup> Repeatedly the principles of life and ministry in the local church, as we find them set out in I Corinthians, are universalized in Ephesians. But the universal perspective of Ephesians grows out of something already latent in I Corinthians. While I Corinthians is addressed to 'the church of God that is in Corinth', it is intended also for 'all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ' (I Cor. 1:1)—primarily, it may be, in the same province of Achaia, but not explicitly and probably not exclusively so. The church throughout the world is one, and its oneness depends on the fact that there is one Spirit, one Lord and one God. But the terms in which this is emphasized in Ephesians 4:4-6 are based on I Corinthians 12:4-6, where the collaboration of all the members for the common good in the local church is a corollary of their sharing 'the same Spirit; ... the same Lord; and... the same God'. We might

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antecedently have expected Paul to think of Christians throughout his mission field as forming a unity. 'Israel after the flesh' did not exist only in local synagogues; it was an ecumenical entity. The synagogue in any place was the local manifestation of the whole congregation of Israel. So with the new Israel: what we might antecedently have expected is confirmed by the evidence in Paul's earlier letters of his deep concern for Christian unity, not only unity among his own Gentile churches but unity which bound them together with the Jerusalem church and the churches of the Jewish mission.

Again, all Christians according to Paul were baptized 'into Christ', not merely into a local fellowship, and thus formed part of one spiritual whole. The Christians in Corinth are reminded that they are Christ's body, and individually members thereof (I Cor. 12:27); similarly those in Rome are told that 'we' (that is, not the Roman Christians only but the Roman Christians in fellowship with other Christians), 'though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another' (Rom. 12:5). But to Paul's way of thinking Christ could no more be parcelled out between the several congregations than He could be divided between the factions within the congregation at Corinth. Language such as he uses to the Corinthian and Roman Christians could not be locally restricted, even if the occasions of his writing to them directed its application to the conditions of local fellowship. All believers everywhere had together died with Christ and been raised with Him; as participators in His risen life they could not but constitute one Christian fellowship. The explicit exposition of the universal church in Ephesians is an unfolding of the significance of Paul's phrase 'in Christ' and all that goes with it. Here too we are bound to recognize authentic development within the New Testament.

## THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

But there is another New Testament document which displays the features of 'incipient Catholicism' more impressively still, and that is Acts. From the middle of the second century

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<sup>5</sup> In *Studies in Luke—Acts* ed. L. E. Keck and J. L. Martyn (1966), p. 288.

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onwards it has been called 'The Acts of the Apostles' not because it records the acts of all the apostles (it does not) but because it does not confine itself to one strand of apostolic tradition. Paul may be the author's hero—although in the only places where he calls Paul an apostle he makes him share the designation with Barnabas (Acts 14:4, 14)—but Peter receives a fair share of attention: indeed, commentators have drawn out the parallels in this work between the 'Acts of Peter' (chs. 1-12) and the 'Acts of Paul' (chs. 13-28). At the Council of Jerusalem, Peter and even James come down in principle on the side of salvation through grace by faith, apart from legal works; and the letter sent to the Gentile churches by the apostle and elders of the Jerusalem church makes appreciative reference to 'our beloved Barnabas and Paul' (Acts 15:25), while Barnabas and Paul, for their part, seem quite happy to accept the stipulations laid down in the letter. Acts certainly gives us the impression that trouble was always prone to break out in Jerusalem when Paul visited the city, but the tension between Paul and the leaders of the Jerusalem church, which can be discerned so pervasively beneath the surface in several of Paul's letters, has left hardly a trace in Acts. In Acts Paul and Barnabas, Peter and James, with their respective associates, appear as a happy band of brothers. On the one occasion when Paul and Barnabas have a sharp difference of opinion, it is on personal grounds, quite unlike the difference at Antioch recorded by Paul, when *even Barnabas*, the last man of whom it might have been expected, was carried away by the 'play-acting' of Peter and the other Jewish Christians (Gal. 2:13).

But when Acts was written, Paul's career was at an end. That career, had been marked by trials and tribulations from within the Christian community as well as from outsiders; but all this could now be recollected in tranquillity. This does not mean that an interval of a generation or two must be postulated between Paul's death and the composition of Acts. We ourselves have known highly controversial figures in church life who in old age enjoyed considerable veneration, even on the part of those who had been involved in

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controversy with them. At that time of day, and all the more so after their death, the general feeling was: Why recall the controversies when so much that is more edifying can be recorded? The controversy at Antioch was crucial enough when it happened, and it was still so when Paul wrote to the Galatians. A few decades later it was ancient history and, from Luke's point of view, might well remain unmentioned. It could make no contribution to the purpose for which he wrote.

## **THE CHURCH'S CALLING**

The church is the dwelling-place of the Spirit, and 'where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom' (II Cor. 3:17). Structures of ministry, government and order are of value so long as they provide vehicles for the free moving of the Spirit; when they cease to do that, they should be replaced by more suitable ones. Whatever at any time helps the church to discharge her proper functions—the worship of God, the strengthening of fellowship within her membership and the witness of outgoing and self-giving love to mankind—that is what matters. When the church thinks more of her status than of her service, she has taken a wrong path and must immediately retrace her steps. As the church's Lord was (and remains) the Man for others, the church must be the society for others, the community of the reconciled which is

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at the same time the instrument by which the reconciling grace of God in Christ is communicated to the world. All that enables the church to be this is true development; all that hinders the church from being this is departure.

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